

INTRODUCTION: MARKETING PRACTICE AND CRITICAL INQUIRY

In thinking about marketing practice, what frequently comes to mind are the acknowledged figures of authority that inhabit the discipline. Often, for students, academics and indeed for practitioners, their bookshelves, or e equivalents, are populated with the works of traditional masters, like Kotler, et al (2009) and McDonald (2007). These types of works and the style of academic articles they generate represent the repository of wisdom and are a major source of authority in marketing (Brown 1998). Arguably, marketing's dominant conceptual framework is embedded in these texts, where the rhetoric that is deployed is about systems and overarching models of marketing thought. It is not unreasonable to suggest that what we have in much current marketing theory is a dominant discourse that orders perceptions, "where there exists an invariable and privileged structure of predetermined categories" (Brownlie and Saren 2004, p2). It is this type of all embracing, axiomatic marketing theory that this paper seeks to contest, where paradoxically, the study of practice often gets neglected. Debates along similar lines have emerged in the pages of Marketing Intelligence and Planning before, see for example Brennan and Ankers (2004); McCole (2004); Saren (2007). Other work that is also critical of aspects of mainstream marketing can also be found in the marketing management literature, reflecting a degree of unease in the academic and practitioner community with regard to the efficacy of traditional theory. The research of Hills et al (2008) for example, found that successful entrepreneurs held cognitive models of marketing that did not come anywhere near those offered in leading textbooks and that practitioners were found to be successful in unconventional ways. Notable other critical examples include the work of O'Driscoll and Murray (1998); Brownlie and Saren (1997; 2004) and Hackley (2000; 2001), all of whom take issue with traditional marketing management theory in one way or another.

This paper joins this debate. The argument here is that what can be termed as marketing's 'grand theory' - a term first coined by the sociologist C. Wright Mills in (1970) - is consistently failing to provide us with adequate insights into the world of the marketing manager. Crucially, this dominant framework routinely ignores the diversity of individual action and meaning creation in organisations. Largely neglected are emotions, intuitions, people's motives and the context dependent language that managers work with. Boden (1994) indicates that this type of systemic based perspective means that social actors rarely get seen because they are controlled by the collectivities of which they are an unsuspecting part. Here, the restrictive thinking of mainstream theory arguably distils and simplifies complex human action into neat packages of pre-given terms and meanings that fail to reflect the real nature of organisations. This paper is an attempt to respond to this lacuna, using phenomenology as a theoretical lens through which to critically review mainstream marketing theory. The intention here is not to engage in detailed disputations with individual authors of the grand theory persuasion. Instead, the aim is to take issue with the general perspective they work within.

Concerns about getting closer to practice are picked up in the work of C Wright Mills (1970), who suggested that a concentration by social scientists on the development of totalising systemic views of society means that there is consequently an undue emphasis placed on grand theory and abstraction. The result is that we understand little of the micro worlds of individuals. **Very** clear parallels exist here in regard to established marketing management theory. As Tapp and Hughes (2008) point out, there is an attempt in the latter to ape the methods of the natural sciences. This leads to the development of broad generalisable theories, present in both textbooks and research, as to the way the marketing world should function. These authors suggest that the models break down when we examine the activities of individuals, as people often act on the basis of instinct

and impulse rather than on the imperatives of theory. Consistent with this perspective, the study of practice is seen by Schatzki (2001), as an attempt to break free from the grip of objectified systems and to examine individual activity. Oddly, although the world of marketing practice is populated by a range of well known figures like Richard Branson, Steve Jobs and Michael Ryan, this feature of business is not replicated in mainstream marketing writing (Brown 2008). One might reasonably ask how much of their marketing decision making is down to hubris, instinct, context and simple enjoyment- the actions of individual people - rather than **to** the doctrines of axiomatic marketing management theory.

A FUNCTIONAL CRITIQUE OF MARKETING: THE HUMAN FACE OF PRACTICE

It is clear that the notion of being critical can take a variety of different forms and indeed, there is no one agreed definition of what it actually entails. Strands can be identified from several diverse perspectives. As Schroeder (2007) has pointed out, criticism is very prevalent in the humanities, i.e. in the areas of literary, art and film criticism. On a more commonplace level, critical thinking is routinely demanded for by teachers of their students, where the latter are asked to go beyond the merely descriptive to incorporate critical thinking in their work. In this sense, critical thinking denotes a higher level of intellectual achievement than the simple regurgitation of received ideas. As an example, the Open University (2008) has produced for its students a comprehensive booklet on the topic called 'Thinking Critically'. Critical thinking is however, not just an academic skill. It is something that is directly transferable to the work place in terms of things such as managing projects, thus arguably making 'criticism' a relevant skill for the business school curricula. In terms of another variation, Antonacopoula (2010) identifies an approach known as reflexive critique, a method that encourages a questioning of existing ways of seeing and of arguments and propositions. Here, reflexive critique should be based in and on the work of practitioners, thus making possible the renewal of old processes and individual actions.

A different, very specific strand of critical theory emerged in the 20th century, based in the Frankfurt school. German academic writers argued that the taken for granted beliefs about society held by individuals was largely shaped by the historical and social contexts in which they found themselves (Adorno and Horkheimer 1998). The key concerns of these critical theorists are that human freedom was being restrained through structures of domination and repression. Other significant critical theorists include Habermas and Foucault, both of whom have been influential in terms of debates surrounding the study of values, power and knowledge in management (Brooke 2002). With regard to marketing, it is apparent then that lines of critical inquiry can potentially go down a number of specific routes. Debates and research can be centred on the validity of marketing as an intellectual endeavour and as an ethical and political practice Burton (2001). Hackley (2009) identifies a further strand, one he labels the functional critique, representing a general argument of this paper which says that marketing theory does not work in the way it says it does. Whilst Scott (2007) may be overstating the case that marketing studies is part of a relatively unquestioning management enterprise, it is suggested here that a critical functional argument needs to be more strongly made. The intention here is to illustrate and argue for a general position which states that the individual actions of marketers are not dictated by systems and abstract marketing processes. Instead, marketing action is brought about by the act of individual agency.

UNDERSTANDING PRACTICE: MINGER'S FRAMEWORK AND THE CONTRIBUTION OF A CRITICAL PHENOMENOLOGY

Irrespective of the various schools of thought of what it means to be critical, is the point that they all promote a sense of reflection and questioning. The result is that being critical entails different forms of critique. In order to facilitate the latter approach, this paper utilises the four forms of critique identified by Mingers (2000). His framework can be used to question and reflect on the dominant marketing management approach, highlighting its lack of emphasis regarding the role of human agency. In the construction and execution of marketing theory in as it appears in textual form, it is argued that practising marketers show little self reflexivity or doubt and certainly, not emotion or intuition. In this respect Damasio (1994) has produced convincing argument and evidence to show that emotions are an integral part of the decision making process, but marketing theory chooses to ignore what might appear to be this messy aspect of reality.

In addition to Minger's framework, this paper is further informed by a critical phenomenological perspective (Berger and Luckman 1966). Phenomenology is a humanistic method, present in consumer studies but rarely used in the study of marketing management practice, as the review of Goulding (2004) suggests. In phenomenology, the philosophical claims it makes are actually fairly straightforward. People are not seen as simply the product of systems, as marketing management theory often purports either explicitly or implicitly, but are actors who create their own patterns of meaningful activity (Cope (2005); Moustakas (1994). Phenomenology usually deploys the depth interview as the main tool of research. Theoretically, other qualitative methods, for example ethnography, are clearly compatible with the humanising aims of phenomenology (Marshall and Rossman 1999), hence this paper includes a discussion of these where appropriate. As far back as the nineteen eighties Kent (1986), was making the point that more of a phenomenological perspective was needed when studying marketing. The argument is that there is a requirement to better understand the processes whereby marketing managers construct their own interpretations of marketing realities, rather than viewing activity through the restricted lens of traditional theory. Important aspects of phenomenology revolve around understanding the softer experiential truths of marketers, where reality is not structured by a technocratic discourse.

When used in the context of a critical phenomenology, Minger's framework can help reveal a great deal about the shortcomings of marketing management theory. Minger's identifies four different features of a critical approach. A critique of *rhetoric* should be concerned with asking whether or not a position taken is sound, based on reasonable assumptions, and is logical. The critique of *tradition* questions customs and the taken for granted practices a discipline exhibits. The critique of *authority* further questions the hegemony of a single viewpoint. Instead, it argues for accepting a plurality of positions. Fourthly, the critique of *objectivity* denies the idea that there is pure value free knowledge, existing independently of established power relations. Minger's initially developed his framework in order to propose a critical approach to management education, where his intention was to use an approach facilitating critical reflection on the material management students were being presented with in their programmes. As a consequence, Minger's framework can be constantly returned to in order to contest and debate various validity claims. For Minger's, (2000), validity is about attempting to establish that all communication is comprehensible, factually true, right in a normative sense and sincere. Importantly, validity claims should be open for contestation through sustained debate, and the arguments in this paper are put forward in this spirit.

AN INQUIRY INTO PRACTICE: PHENOMENOLOGY AND THE CRITICAL FRAMEWORK OF MINGERS

A critique of rhetoric

The first aspect of Minger's framework to consider is the critique of rhetoric. In terms of the logicity and the justification behind the rhetoric of marketing management theory, it is suggested that it routinely makes false assumptions about how people in organisations act. Beneath surface claims, there exists a doubtful view of the person, where it is assumed that the individual is driven principally by impersonal forces external to them. It is alleged for example, that it is the system based imperatives of the marketing plan which dictate individual action, concomitant with the organisations culture and its external environment (see Wilson and Gilligan 2005 for an example). Scant regard is thus given to the subjective dispositions of employees. There exists in this mainstream perspective, an implicit psychology of managerial action where little or no reference is made to the human condition of managers. For example, despite its evident use in practical marketing decision making, there is no acknowledgement of tacit knowledge and the 'gut feelings' of humans which are often influential in decision making (Baumard 1999; Hackley 1999). A phenomenological perspective, which stresses the importance of individual interpretation of situations, fails to feature in the 'one size fits all' marketing approach. In support of this, Carson and Gilmore (2000); Hills et al (2008) indicate that there can be no general, workable theory of marketing when every situation is differently constructed and interpreted by organisational actors. For Quinn et al (2007), there are strong aspects of marketing management practice that relate to its intuitive nature and additionally, their study of market segmentation reveals that marketing work is actually part of a complex social field, rather than being about narrow theoretical prescriptions and generalisations.

A key issue here is that knowledge is often personal and subjective, rather than being embedded in impersonal systems. A consequence of this is that each manager has a reservoir of wisdom which is embedded within the context of their own organisation, rather than in abstract marketing models. For Brownlie and Spender (1995) at the heart of practitioner knowledge in marketing is judgement. For Dunne (1999), judgement is the central predicament of practice. To use judgement, means to respect the individuality of the situation and this is a tacit accomplishment; but the issue is – where does it feature in marketing theory? Generally, despite its importance to practice, the appearance of tacit knowledge as a topic in theory texts and research into marketing is very sketchy. It exists in reality though. In support of uncovering the tacit, human dimension of marketing management, Alvesson (1998), in an ethnographic study of work in an advertising agency, noted that doing the job is reported to call for intuition and feeling, rather than linear marketing models. In the study, problem-solving was found not to be tangible or concrete. In fact anti-bureaucratic ideals were said to dominate the workplace. Maclaren and Catterill (2000) and Maclaren and Stevens (2008), also argue that marketing practice in reality is emotional and subjective, rather than formal and linear.

Also, in terms of marketing management's faulty view of the person, reasoning in prescriptive theory can also be questioned in terms of when we think about people acting out in cultural settings. The marketing management model is based not only on shared notions regarding the supposed applicability of a range of techniques, but also on a supposedly shared cultural vision of customer centeredness and marketing orientation. This idea of an automatically shared intersubjectivity is questionable though. Both Marion (1993) and Thomas (1993) support the idea that the traditional prescriptions of marketing are inadequate, because the aims of organisations and their members are not given in any systemically determined way.

Additionally, Weick (1995) points out that shared meanings in organisations are difficult to obtain because people have different prior experiences which they then label and deal with in idiosyncratic ways. This perspective provides a problem for traditional theory, which sees the implementation of a wholly realised marketing culture as generally unproblematic. In contrast, the work of Harris and Ogbonna (1999) highlight the extent to which the prescriptive theory and research on achieving a marketing orientated culture is flawed. In particular, their work points out the importance of different organisational conditions and the problems of building consensus in a situation of disparity. Put simply, part time cashiers in a retail organisation probably have different work values and by implication, diverse reasons for being at work, compared to the senior marketing director. In terms of this critical frame, Hackley (2003p1327), makes a telling point that “marketing management texts work up a managerial world devoid of discordance and awash with manufactured consensus.” The contrary nature of organisational politics, a feature routinely ignored in marketing management theory, suggests that the rather simplistic models the latter offer, fail to grasp complexity. People will classify the world in many different ways and these classifications become real in their effects, as managers and staff work through the meaning they attach to the word ‘marketing’ and its implementation.

A critique of tradition

As Marion (2007) has noted very insightfully, the dominant thinking in marketing is not about studying and explaining how it functions as a practice, but how it should actually work. Examples of this latter approach include McDonald (2007) and Philips et al, (2001). In this context, Mingers (2000) notes that the boundaries of what constitutes the right approach are often set by technical experts. In the case of marketing, the powerful traditional groups are constituted by business consultants, publishers, text authors and business schools, all of whom exhibit popular, mainstream notions of marketing. For Mingers, a critique of tradition is about questioning this type of conventional wisdom. In terms of the latter, the model of marketing management that is presented is a very consistent one. It is linear and technically rational, applicable to both large and small organisations alike and to all industry groupings (Brooksbank, 1996; Brown 2001). So, in the mainstream perspective, marketing appears to be composed of general laws and if these are not being presented in marketing textbooks, then the researcher is busy trying to uncover them empirically, see for example Greenley and Bayus (1993); Greenley et al 2004). This is a key point made by Tapp (2004) and Tapp and Hughes (2008), where the latter are critical of marketing’s attempts to generalise knowledge about practice.

Alternatively, a phenomenological perspective suggests that marketing can be anything we say it is (Robson and Rowe 1997). The latter note for example, the emphasis placed on selling as a central feature of marketing strategy by some practitioners, a point of contention in conventional theory. It is possible to argue then, that marketing in practice is not a fixed point of certainty. Marketing, in terms of meaning and action, is going to be different for a small company hiring out building tools to one that sells financial services. But where and when is this contingent complexity faced up to by the dominant marketing management theory? It is actually very difficult to locate. The convoluted nature of contexts and the human interpretative side of marketing is really not engaged with by the technical model. This dominant traditional knowledge base can get to be used in interesting ways however. Whittington (1993) sees marketing management theory being used as a resource by human agents in pursuit of their own individual agendas, with little bearing on practical accomplishment. He argues that managers with MBAs can reflexively call on the ideological resources of their profession where the value of an award is often about packaging, rather than

content. This is less about technical answers to problems, more about the enhanced legitimacy won by a lustrous display of knowledge. Here possibly, is human hubris at work, rather than anything else. Given the points made above, there may be little belief in the practical applications of the learnt theories by these practising managers, but the MBA is still useful as a rhetorical device, confirming the supposed value of traditional business knowledge. Despite this apparent anomaly, marketing management theory regularly reinforces the notion of a right approach. This is by way of perpetuating standard frameworks in research and textbooks, through consultancy practice, the pedagogy of business schools and the courses offered by marketing's professional bodies. In terms of Minger's framework, there is an obvious conventional wisdom in widespread use, one which remains relatively unshakable.

A critique of authority

The third critical area that Minger's article raises is about authority. Current marketing management theory actively promotes itself as *the* framework, as *the* authority, capable at times of denigrating alternative perspectives which fall outside of the generalisable model of marketing (see McDonald 2003). Relatively little research on marketing management and certainly not textbooks, would think of beginning with any major alternative perspectives. Therefore, what is a worrying limitation imposed by the dominant position is the way in which alternative perspectives get debated and developed. As an example, although the relationship paradigm is discussed in some situations, it has not joined, or really contested, the dominant theory framework (Gumesson 2008: Gronross 2007). Significantly, many texts and research into marketing do not question the taken for granted assumptions about how things should be done or theorised. To do this, would be to threaten the dominant position and the existing influential views and modes of learning about marketing.

An alternative perspective on marketing that draws on a phenomenological approach is the construction of reality through narrative. This has however, been largely ignored in established marketing management theory, although it enjoys wider coverage in consumer behaviour studies. The different types of narrative as used by organisational members could provide a very rich insight into how marketing is actually managed in practice (Hopkinson and Hogarth – Scott 2001). There exists then, enormous scope to use a story telling approach in the study of marketing management, reflecting the fact that people routinely makes sense of their lives through the stories they tell. The problem is that this approach systematically undermines the dominant perspective. If marketing is shown to be composed of diverse narratives with individually based, locally contingent solutions to problems, where does this leave the dominant theory? Whilst it certainly applies in some limited circumstances, it is dangerous to assume that will always be the case. In line with the narrative based perspective, Svennson (2007) carried out a phenomenological study of marketing work. His research shows that marketing managers actually mainly inhabit a multifaceted world of language, where different narratives compete constantly with each other. Individuals must navigate their way through these narratives in order to make sense of what is going on. Importantly then, areas that a phenomenological perspective can usefully investigate are heavily imbued with features of the human condition, one of which is the urge for storytelling. We can also include here the influence of an individual's self identity – am I ambitious? Do I have limited personal objectives? Am I a plodder? These are important individual factors when it comes to people's jobs and their sense of self. Further, to reflect the study of Quinn et al (2007), what sense do I have as an individual, of what can and what cannot work, faced with a strategy decision? These are typically factors dependent on human vagaries and characteristics, existing outside of traditional marketing management theory. As a consequence, it is suggested that marketing decision making is something personal and

subjective, based on the interpretative nature of knowledge. In line with this, Ardley (2008) carried out a number of phenomenologically based interviews with marketing managers, revealing that practice was not based on marketing management theory, but on human factors like intuition and the significance of local contexts in decision making. For managers in the study it was metaphors that described reality and significantly, their own narratives became important resources through which to manage marketing.

Another good example of a successful marketer basing decisions on their own individual perceptions of reality rather than that of the accepted authoritative position of the discipline, is provided by *The Marketer*, (Barda 2008, p26-9). In the magazine, there is an interview with Ian McNought, marketing and design manager of Pearl and Dean, the well known cinema advertising company. The interviewer brought the assumptions of traditional marketing theory to the exchange, couching their questions in terms of conventional marketing principles, using terms like plans, targets, and objectives. When asked about the area of objectives, McNought responded by saying that he tore up the list of marketing objectives the company had when he first became marketing manager, because everything is.. “too fluid to set out something in January that we would follow for the rest of the year” When then asked if McNought knew whether or not by doing this he can tell whether or not targets were being met, the response was that... “We don’t really have targets...it’s more organic – whatever the business needs at a given moment.” In the area of practice there are many examples such as this, suggesting a mismatch between what is prescribed by marketing theory and what actually occurs. The case is that in contrast to the dominant representation of marketing, many successful marketers actually carry out their actions in a way that runs counter to its textual authority. As another example, Steve Jobs of Apple, through purposefully engineered shortages, designed to keep customers keen, carries out no prior marketing research (Brown (2008).

A critique of objectivity

The fourth and final aspect of Minger’s critiques concerns issues at the very heart of marketing management theory, namely, a belief that it is possible to view marketing as an objective and neutral technology to be turned on or off at will and transported from one situation to another. The issue is, as Brownlie and Saren (1997) point out, that the marketing manager’s role is represented in objective terms as a straightforward model of analysis, planning and control. For Mingers, the argument is that knowledge is never objective, but often related to issues of power and control. In the case of marketing, it is argued that the dominant framework reflects a predilection on the part of its adherents towards promoting a particular hegemonic view of science that is purportedly objective. Here, the work of Whittington (2004) makes a powerful contribution. Adopting the strategy as practice perspective, he argues that we are now in an ‘after modernism’ phase of social development, where modernism previously attempted to capture strategy in a detached objective fashion. Due to the influence of post modernism with its relativist implications, Whittington argues that it is now possible to engage with strategy as an activity undertaken by people as something they do, rather than as the result of the implementation of modernism and its apparently objective scientific systems. For Whittington, strategy as practice studies can now go beyond this, to examine the actual activity undertaken by practitioners. Here, in line with the call of this special edition of *Marketing Intelligence and Planning*, a critically positioned relativist form of inquiry into practice, like phenomenology, can inform researchers about the human realities of the practitioner’s world. This could be achieved by being able to examine issues as diverse as the individual skills required in marketing strategy development, how they are acquired and developed and further, what the future of the discipline and its incumbents may look like.

That the individual perceptions of actors in organisations are routinely ignored becomes further evident when we think about the manner in which the external environment is analysed. A central tenet of marketing management theory is based on one which suggests the environment can be unambiguously defined and then analysed in an objective manner. In a significant nod towards the phenomenological perspective Astley (1985), and Smircich and Stubbart (1985), both argue that the environment is subjectively perceived and constructed by organisational members as individual acts. It can be suggested that what happens is that the social knowledge of managers becomes their environment. A case in point serves to illustrate. Research conducted by Knibbs et al (1987), clearly highlights how different managers within the same organisation construct significantly dissimilar organisational analyses, even though they are all supposedly describing the same external environments. This position is supported by Weick, (1995) who points out that if managers do not notice, or are not concerned by certain environmental events, then they will not be acted upon. The environment is not some real material object then, as often supposed by marketing management theory, but is a much more complex, relative phenomenon, as is marketing itself (Robson and Rowe 1997).

In a commentary on marketing planning, Brown (2001) illustrates the inherent contradictions in the marketing discipline which on the one hand, exhorts companies to differentiate their offering, and on the other hand, extols managers to dispense every plan into a similar mechanistic mould. Specifically, we need to look no further than texts on marketing planning (i.e. Wilson and Gilligan 2005) to see that this confirms the 'mechanistic' case argument. Texts like the latter are about supposed objective regularities in behaviour and the pursuance of general marketing laws. The person becomes totally immersed within a universal system, where they are subsumed by elements of the external environment, the components of the marketing mix and the five forces that effect competition. The problem with the idea of objectivity here is that there is no one simple overarching representational device through which we can view what actually people do, or even think, in organisations. In the Quinn et al (2007) study of market segmentation for example, it is clearly illustrated that the owner of the Reiss fashion chain did not follow the rational technical approach to strategy, but largely followed his own subjective judgments. Furthermore, in support of this line of argument, the study carried out by Ellis et al (2005), shows that it is a range of discursive repertoires like *caution*, *power*, *loyalty*, *resource exchange* and *interdependency* that help to structure and mediate action, not a set of disembodied marketing theory tools.

CONCLUSION: UNCOVERING THE HUMAN ELEMENT IN MARKETING PRACTICE THROUGH A CRITICAL PHENOMENOLOGY

Bettany (2007), in commenting reflexively on her own critical PhD thesis, was worried about simplifying her disciplinary colleagues work. This sentiment is an important one. But then this sort of criticism can be raised against mainstream approaches to marketing as well. For it too can be accused of simplicity, failing as it does, to embrace the complexity of the human individual and their actions, the key argument of this paper. Organisational actors, as reflective humans, create and reproduce their own meanings, consequently acting out marketing work in ways that often do not bear resemblance to the world of the textual model. It is suggested here, that marketing is primarily something done by individuals for other individuals and that this human element is central to marketing activity. However, rather than conduct detailed phenomenological and ethnographic studies of marketing management behaviour, there is a preference instead, in the mainstream perspective, to study a range of disembodied forces. These include factors like the external environment, abstract information processing models of consumer behaviour, or other forms of statistically determined relationships that lack the

involvement of the human side of practice. A perusal of any of the key texts of the marketing orthodoxy, along with some influential journal papers will reveal few accounts of marketing people, their idiosyncrasies, ambiguities and emotion driven behaviour. Tapp (2004) reflects on this, noting the general lack of research into marketing that takes an exploratory look at activity in organisations using case studies and ethnography. Instead, what is preferred is the execution of large scale numbers based research work carried out within the confines of an abstract general theory (Tapp and Hughes 2008).

To return to the framework developed by Minger's. He poses that communicative utterances are subjected to a validity check. What is suggested here is that the marketing orthodoxy's claim to validity be questioned on a number of grounds. Firstly, its rhetoric suggests that there is no clear understanding of the way in which reality gets constructed by individuals acting in social settings, where there exists a flawed view of the person. The logic of the dominant model is unsound in that it suggests practice is primarily mediated through general marketing management theory. Additionally, there is always the risk that even as people learn about the latter, they will once in situ, act in ways that counterweigh the dominant authority. It has to be recognised that humans are open and un-programmable. They may, as sovereign beings, seek out other resources from which they can secure a sense of themselves and what they do. Secondly, the critique of tradition in Minger's framework shows that the dominant discourse of marketing is fairly narrowly based and perhaps somewhat authoritarian. This point is not widely recognised or accepted by a set of influential forces and figures in the discipline that maintain the status quo. Thirdly, the critique of authority illustrates that there is very little room for alternative perspectives of what marketing is constituted by, despite that fact that some, like managers storytelling, can actually reveal a great deal about what is going on in a practitioners world. With regard to prescriptive marketing and this issue of diversity of approach, it is interesting to note that the American sociologist C Wright Mills (1970p99) pointed out that the sociology textbook "readily become a rather mechanical gathering of facts to illustrate more or less settled conceptions." Clearly, many years later, this type of criticism can be levelled at marketing management theory. As C Wright Mills points out, the research possibilities of new ideas are not usually considered very important to put into textbooks. This resonates with marketing similarly, as the four Ps approach for example, is still firmly entrenched, despite sustained criticism of its utility (see Piercy 2002, Brown 1995). As McCole (2004) argues, practitioners are actively engaged in areas such as retro marketing and experiential marketing, but goes on to say that there are no chapters devoted to these new ways of thinking in textbooks. The fourth and final area of critique for Minger's is about objectivity. In terms of this critique and the strategy as practice agenda, it has been argued above that this provides the opportunity to not only question the dominant apparently neutral research project, but to actively encourage a more widespread and meaningful engagement with the experiences of the practising manager.

In developing this last point, Whittington (1996), argues that business educators need to understand not only conceptual abstract notions, but also how individual practitioners operate within their own particular area. Encouragingly, in marketing, some work is taking place in this area. Fleisher and Wright (2008) have embarked on a major funded study of the teaching of pragmatic approaches to marketing and competitive analysis. This will undoubtedly inform a functional critique, pushing forward our understanding of actual marketing practice. Their early work identified a continuum of skills encompassing some of the craft knowledge necessary for the effective practice of marketing. In terms of further research, of use here would not only be phenomenology, but also Minger's critical framework. Adopting this type of approach should help to ensure that we better understand marketing practice and the role played by human agency in its execution. The adoption of a more critical and more humanistic method of inquiry

could begin to uncover more fully the complex nature of a marketer's reality. Here, currently, divergence from the dominant model is sometimes seen as a quaint aberration, a result of a failure to understand marketing properly, or the problem of a lack of requisite skills. We should however, start to see the inadequacies of an approach that views the practitioner as being perpetually deficient. Alternatively, the arguments in this paper suggests that a mainly practice based phenomenological take on marketing management opens up the intricacies of what practitioners do, feel and think, where preconceived theory does not force a judgement and where success can come in often surprising ways. It is now appropriate a change in direction regarding the marketing management theory agenda. The time is right to take much more seriously the micro, human element in the study of marketing practice.

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